

Brighton and Hove’s nearly two-decade long collaborative approach to urban food policy is a widely recognized model for sustainable food system transformation. It was the first city in the UK to create a citywide food strategy and the first to win GOLD SUSTAINABLE FOOD CITY status by the SUSTAINABLE FOOD PLACES NETWORK. These achievements could not have been possible without the BRIGHTON AND HOVE FOOD PARTNERSHIP (BHFP), an independent, non-profit organization that coordinates city-based food work across community organizations, government agencies, local businesses, and residents. BHFP’s holistic and collective approach to food policy has successfully nurtured a food system that promotes people’s health and livelihoods while protecting the environment.

ENABLERS

INTEGRATING FOOD, HEALTH, AND CLIMATE POLICIES

One of BHFP’s greatest achievements has been institutionalizing integrated food policies across the city. Brighton and Hove knows that fostering a fair and sustainable food system is a powerful way to tackle the CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL CRISES. The City Council now embeds sustainable food system work in every one of its departments, from public health and environment to economic development. For example, for the City’s healthy weight initiative, the public health department works with diverse stakeholders on a healthy weight program board to ensure that food is not treated solely for its nutritional benefits. BHFP brings organizations and people together to work collaboratively on food issues, and in doing so successfully garners support across the political party spectrum. For example, the City’s BID FOR GOLD SUSTAINABLE FOOD CITY STATUS gained high-level endorsement and commitment across party lines. This cross-sectoral and citywide approach puts food on all agendas and mainstreams integrated food policies.

ENABLING CITIZEN AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN FOOD POLICY

Brighton and Hove’s food policy work is highly collaborative and coordinated among a multitude of organizations, businesses, and individuals across the city through the BHFP. Different public engagement strategies are employed depending on the project. City-wide surveys and consultations with community experts are common, but with marginalized groups, the BHFP often employs focus group discussions. The BHFP also partners with universities on assessments and conducts citizen science projects. Public engagement for the latest Food Strategy Action Plan involved gathering hundreds of citizens’ visions of a sustainable food city, pledges from the public, and a social media campaign.

THE BRIGHTON AND HOVE FOOD PARTNERSHIP (BHFP)

- In 2003, the BHFP took a leadership role in advocating for a systemic approach to food, one that embraces complexity and works citywide through a food strategy action plan.
- The first BRIGHTON AND HOVE FOOD STRATEGY ACTION PLAN was launched in 2006. Since 2018, the latest plan involves almost 100 partners and 26 separate city council departments, including oversight by an expert panel on 200 actions for a healthy, sustainable, and fair food system.
- The City Council is a key partner in the BHFP and a councilor sits on its board.
- The BHFP uses a number of community outreach mechanisms to inform programs and policies.
- BHFP employs over 10 staff members working on a range of projects, from on-the-ground programs like THE COMMUNITY KITCHEN to policy and strategy work.

BARRIERS

DIFFICULTY IN MAINTAINING PARTNERSHIPS AMID AUSTERITY

One of the greatest challenges that the BHFP faces is the ability to maintain strong partnerships in the midst of government austerity measures. Cuts in public spending have resulted in personnel cuts in the public sector and high turnover rates due to heavy workloads. Partnership-building and trust-building are difficult and take time, and a constant state of change only adds to this challenge. To overcome this issue, the BHFP takes what they call a “pop-up” approach whereby they organize ad hoc consultations, confer with an expert panel, and always look to tap into any relevant events that bring people together.

“I don’t think the national agenda has caught up. I don’t think they’ve got their food goggles on, as we call them. They’re not looking through the lens of food to align agendas across agriculture, environment, and health. The national food strategy is an opportunity to do some of this.”

LACK OF FOOD POLICY ALIGNMENT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Brighton and Hove instituted ambitious food policies and programs, but these are not supported by an equally ambitious food strategy action plan at the national level where food is not yet viewed systemically or holistically. For example, food is often missing from national action on climate change, and while there are national ministers of agriculture, environment, and health, a food minister could align these agendas. A national food strategy action plan could provide the long-term, comprehensive funding required for transformational food system change. Indeed, the government-commissioned NATIONAL FOOD STRATEGY published in July 2021 may indicate the tide is turning at the national level. Of the seven specific recommendations put forward in the report responding to urgent issues of hunger, health, trade, and food standards, the Government has already agreed to implement four.

Brighton and Hove’s successful integrated and collaborative approach to food policy has been recognized as a model for cities. Among some of their achievements, the Brighton and Hove partnership have tripled the number of community gardens, reduced the number of overweight and obese children, developed award-winning MINIMUM BUYING STANDARDS for council catering contracts, and embedded food into eight major local policy documents. The BHFP are also committed to developing innovative methods to measure food system impact citywide and have drafted an INDICATOR FRAMEWORK linked to the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS. They look forward to learning from and sharing their experience with other cities internationally through the Glasgow Declaration as they already do nationally through the Sustainable Food Places Network. Brighton and Hove also hope to collaborate more at the national and international levels to ensure that integrated food policies are prioritized in national agendas.

